



**U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement**

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News Release

ICE LAUNCHES OPERATION COMMUNITY SHIELD WITH THE ARREST OF 103 MS-13 GANG MEMBERS IN SIX U.S. CITIES

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Michael J. Garcia, Homeland Security Assistant Secretary for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), today announced the arrest of 103 members of the violent street gang Mara Salvatrucha 13 (MS-13) across the nation as part of a new anti-gang initiative called “Operation Community Shield.”

Since late last month, teams of ICE agents working with their federal, state, and local counterparts have arrested 30 MS-13 gang members in the New York metropolitan area; 25 in the Washington, D.C. metro area; 17 in the Los Angeles metro area; 10 in the Baltimore metro area; 10 in the Newark metro area; and 10 in the Miami metro area. One arrest was also made in the Dallas metro area. The individuals were arrested on a range of criminal and /or administrative charges.

The 103 individuals arrested to date are accused of violations that range from felony charges of re-entering the United States after deportation, to violating state anti-gang injunctions, to violating the terms of their immigration status due to prior convictions for attempted murder, sodomy, assault, arson, weapons possession, and narcotics violations. Roughly half of these 103 individuals have prior arrests or convictions for violent crimes. Several also have charges of murder pending against them. For example:

- On March 13, ICE agents in Los Angeles arrested an individual who admitted he was one of the founding members and leaders of the MS-13 clique in Hollywood, California. A former member of the Salvadoran military, the suspect has prior convictions in the U.S. for robbery, possession of a dangerous weapon, and mail theft. He was arrested on administrative immigration violations.
- On March 10, ICE and the Long Branch (New Jersey) Police Department arrested an individual suspected of being the leader of the MS-13 clique in Long Branch, New Jersey. The suspect has a prior criminal history of aggravated arson, weapons possession, grand larceny, and criminal possession of stolen property. He was arrested on administrative immigration violations.
- On March 10, ICE and Suffolk County (New York) Police Department arrested an individual suspected of being one of the original MS-13 clique leaders in Port Washington, New York. The

suspect has a prior conviction for marijuana possession. He was arrested on administrative immigration violations.

Operation Community Shield is a nationwide ICE anti-gang initiative designed to disrupt, dismantle, and prosecute violent gang organizations by employing the full range of authorities and investigative tools available to ICE. Under this initiative, ICE is employing its broad immigration authorities (both criminal and administrative) against gang members, as well as its customs authorities in targeting narcotics smuggling, money laundering, and in seeking the forfeiture of assets.

This initiative also involves strong partnerships and cooperation with existing federal, state, and local anti-gang efforts. Such partnerships are essential to the success of the initiative and to ensure officer safety during operations. The enforcement actions to date have been conducted in coordination with law enforcement at the federal, state, and local levels. ICE will also be working through its 54 Attache offices overseas to cooperate with foreign governments that are also experiencing gang problems, particularly those in Central America.

Under this operation, ICE uses intelligence on gang organizations and leadership provided by state and local authorities. This information is then used whenever possible to arrest, prosecute, and/or deport individual gang members.

The initial target of Operation Community Shield is MS-13, which is one of the largest and most violent street gangs in the United States. The majority of MS-13 members are foreign nationals in this country illegally, making them subject to ICE's criminal and administrative immigration authorities. ICE plans to use these immigration tools to arrest, prosecute, and where appropriate, remove these individuals from the United States. ICE coordinates all deportations with the foreign nations receiving these individuals.

At the same time, many MS-13 members derive income from the sale of illegal drugs and other contraband, making them subject to ICE's counter-drug, financial, and other investigative authorities. Seizure and forfeiture of funds, property, and other illegally-derived assets will be another component of the initiative.

Over the coming months, ICE will be using all these tools in a combined fashion with the ultimate goal of crippling MS-13 organizations across the country. Ultimately, Operation Community Shield will also target other violent street gangs.

"Operation Community Shield is an important public safety initiative for the Department of Homeland Security that targets the proliferation of gang violence throughout the country. By bringing the full range of ICE's immigration and customs authorities in the fight against violent street gangs, we can take hundreds of gang members off the streets and have a significant impact on community safety," said DHS Assistant Secretary Garcia.

"Operation Community Shield is about partnerships with law enforcement at all levels. Only through coordination with our law enforcement counterparts can we dismantle these organizations and restore calm to our communities. I am extremely proud of the joint enforcement efforts thus far and look forward to continued work with authorities across the nation," said Marcy Forman, Director of ICE Investigations.

Operation Community Shield builds on several prior anti-gang initiatives conducted by ICE agents in conjunction with federal, state, and local authorities in specific jurisdictions. In each of these initiatives, ICE

used its broad immigration and customs authorities to help authorities in these areas to disrupt gang activity and reduce gang-related crime.

In Charlotte, for example, ICE agents worked with local authorities throughout 2003 to arrest and remove from the United States more than 100 foreign-born MS-13 gang members. In the three years before this operation, approximately 20 homicides in Charlotte had been attributed to MS-13. Since the operation, there has been a dramatic decline in homicides in Charlotte attributed to MS-13.

Similarly, in a five-week crackdown on gang members in San Diego, California, area, ICE agents worked with local authorities to arrest 45 gang members from October through November 2004. Local law enforcement touted the joint operation as a success in reducing violent gang-related crime.

#ICE#

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities